“Mute Choirboys and Angelic Pigs: The Fable in *Lord of the Flies*”

by J.D. O’Hara

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Questions O’Hara Addresses

1. What does Simon know about the Beast that the other boys do not?
2. Why do the children divide the work so awkwardly that hunting and fire-tending fall to one group?
3. Why is the story’s unbrutish intellectual named Piggy?
4. Why is Beezlebub’s symbol a pig’s head?

O’Hara’s Critical Approach

* This article is focused mainly on a Marxist approach of literary criticism because O’Hara clearly examines how the materialistic society exploits the religious/moral society, representing an imbalance of power.
* O’Hara also takes the Psychological/ Psychoanalytic approach because he incorporates Golding’s thoughts on topics such as religious life within his critique.

God vs. Mammon in *Lord of the Flies*

* O’Hara argues that Golding is trying to demonstrate that society, “tries to serve both God and Mammon; they cannot both be served.”
* This is demonstrated throughout the novel through the choirboys inevitably falling to evil and the fire (or altar as O’Hara puts it) going out.
* “Anyone may be lured from piety.”

O’Hara’s New View on Pigs

* O’Hara writes, “We must conclude that the pigs, like Piggy and Simon, are characterized chiefly as innocent victims, inhabitants of an Eden in which the boys are snakes.”
* Essentially, the connection between Piggy and the pigs is a tool used by Golding to force readers to alter their attitudes towards pigs
* The pigs are an emblem of heaven that the boys rape, raze, and sodomize as they descend into their inherently evil natures

Pigs and the Lords of the Flies (Beezlebub)

* The pig’s head as the Lord of the Flies / the devil is a symbol of “man’s sadistic cruelty to natural things and of his ignorant attempts to placate a falsely externalized evil.”
* This interpretation cannot be reached without the initial characterization of pigs as innocent creatures

Fear in *Lord of the Flies*

* “Fear as a motivating force is everywhere, but we look in vain for love.”
* “Fear as an activating force is the basis for violence and cruelty.”
* We can conclude that the writer believes that the inherent tendency of humans towards fear is what causes much of the conflict in the novel.  O’Hara suggests that because fear is shameful, people try to cover it with evil and violence, such as when the boys kill the sow or how Jack controls his savages out of their fear of the Beast, torture, and hunger.

Relevancy of *Lord of the Flies*

* “Perhaps the basis objection is that its subject is irrelevant” because, as O’Hara states, “man cannot begin anew and create Utopia...whatever we do, think, say, and assume is deeply conditioned by our past.”
* O’Hara believes the book is irrelevant because we cannot start the human race over like the boys did when they landed on a paradise island.
* He writes that if we react similarly to the way the boys acted, it is “more coincidence here than prediction.”

The Beast in *Lord of the Flies*

* O’Hara writes, “Men have banded together out of fear of the Beast, but necessarily have brought the Beast along with them.”
* This indicates that he believes that the Beast is a metaphor for the evil that lies within all humans.
* Golding stated, “Evil is specifically human, and it inhabits the mind, not the body”
* O’Hara interpreted this to mean that though evil resides inside all humans, is only brought out by society, and doesn’t always manifest itself.

**QUESTIONS**

1. Do you agree that *Lord of the Flies* does not function as a mirror of our society? Why or why not?
2. Do you agree that the world is divided into two groups, the religious/moral and the Mammon/materialistic?  Is it true that both cannot be served?